



Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa celebrates the past by contributing to the future

On August 1, over two hundred guests took a step back in time to fifty years ago, as Radisson Aruba Resort, Casino & Spa recreated a bygone era that typified an Aruban vacation when the resort first opened its doors as the Royal Caribbean Resort.

The establishment of Aruba's first full service resort event is considered the true beginning of its tourism industry, which has become the foundation of the island's economy.

The enchanting evening took off in the ballroom foyer with a cocktail party serving welcome Champagne Bellini and hors d'oeuvres.

Radisson Vice President and Managing Director of Operations, Gary Jutz, along with members of the board of the Aruba Scholarship Foundation welcomed the guests who came to celebrate the golden anniversary of "The Grand Dame" of Palm Beach with an elegant evening of which the proceeds would benefit the foundation.

The Aruba Scholarship Foundation provides funding for young Arubans to study at universities abroad, as well as having arranged specially discounted tuition for Caribbean students at the University of Central Florida, UCF Saturday evening's event was a celebration of Aruba's past with an eye to the future of island youth.

As the doors of the Grand Caribbean Ballroom opened - it was elegantly decorated by artist Maria Iresia Martinez - partygoers were seated around formally set banquet tables and the fantastic entertainment program began.

Twenty of Aruba's finest musicians united to recreate the big band sound of that era, under the direction of Eduardo Maya and featuring George Viguier, who along with vocalist Sashiko da Camara is celebrating 60 years performing on Aruba.

Both had been regular performers at the early days of the original Royal Caribbean with the Ralph Flanigan Big Band. The classic ensemble consisted of saxophones, trumpets, trombones, and a rhythm section featuring drums, guitar, bass and piano.

The big band also featured a number of different vocalists, all personally linked to the historical resort property. Performing the opening act, Sashiko da Camara, a diminutive jazz vocalist who came to the then Aruba Caribbean Hotel in 1963 as a member of the Ralph Flanigan Big Band. Sashiko sang nightly at the legendary Bali Club for three months, and having fallen in love with the late George da Camara, the resort's food & beverage manager, she stayed on the island, and has been a local resident since then.

Sashiko brought back memories with her delightful rendition of Paper Moon. Other guest performers included crooner Plácido Hazez whose late father also performed at the hotel as a piano player, heartthrob singer turned politician Edwin Abath and Survivor Band's one and only Ami Mendez, who also returned with her own Last Minute band, for a much-enjoyed set of evergreens.

As an extra surprise, Edwin Abath invited the gathering to join him in a rendition of "Happy Birthday" to one of the icons of Aruba's tourism, Mr. Roderick (Rory) Arends, who was celebrating his birthday that same day.

A specialized, retro menu featuring the elegant offerings of the Royal Carib's culinary team, such as Beef Wellington, accompanied the formal night of nostalgia, which also marked the end of an exposition in the resort's conference rooms which was dedicated to the development of Aruba's tourism industry.

Following dessert, the room started moving and grooving to the sounds of the 70's and 80's.

Once warmed up, Claudine Philips and OREO continued with many of Billboard's Top 40 hits from the 80's, 90's, and up to today.

It was a golden moment in time.

Reliving the past provided a fine evening of entertainment as well as funds for the ASE, which performs a valuable service in assisting island youth in furthering their education, and so contributes to Aruba's future advancement and prosperity.

Organizers of the event expressed their gratitude to sponsors Interpret, Heineken, Romar Trading, Aruba Trading Company, Island Temptations, Marketing Plus and noted artist Elvis Tromp who donated three paintings of the resort to raise additional funds with a silent auction.

Photos by Rona Coster and Rosalie Klein.

